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ABSTRACT

At the turn of the 19th century, the United States was a rapidly growing nation. When the United States acquired territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, the job of maintaining open sea lanes fell to the U.S. Navy. To maintain a strong and well-trained force, the Navy needed to attract personnel to work onboard their ships. It used poster art to advertise as an easy way to reach a large number of people. This lesson plan asks students to interpret a poem and recruiting poster that offers them insight into the life of turn-of-the-century sailors when they first joined the Navy and how their lives at sea differed from life ashore. The lesson contains seven sections: (1) "Lesson Plan"; (2) "Student Introduction Page"; (3) "The Great White Fleet"; (4) "Poem--The Rookie Player"; (5) "Recruiting Poster"; (6) "Student Worksheet"; and (7) "Teacher Answer Sheet". (BT)

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Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY -- NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
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WASHINGTON DC 20374-5060

http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/teach/sail/sailor-1.htm

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Teachers

We created a short activity for your students. They interpret a poem and recruiting poster that will give them insight into the life of turn-of-the-century sailors when they first joined the Navy and how their lives at sea differed from life ashore.

Reminder: A hands-on discovery box in available at the Museum to teach students about everyday life of an early-nineteenth-century sailor. Students will touch and interpret objects that sailors used in their daily lives at sea. Reproductions of a mess kit, uniform, pipe, and other items fill this sea chest. For information on docent-led educational programs, call Sheila Brennan, Director of Education and Public Programs at (202) 433-6826.

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Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

1. Students learn about sailors' everyday life around 1900 by analyzing a poem and recruiting poster.
2. Students interpret poems and poster art as historical evidence.

Instructions:

1. Read background sheet, poem, and poster.
2. Discuss question sheet in groups or complete answers individually.
3. Classroom discussion to follow.
4. Students use the historical poem as a model to compose their own poems. These poems may be e-mailed to the Museum.

Materials:

For Students: Copies of

- Student Introduction Page,
- "The Rookie's Prayer,"
- Recruiting Poster,
- Question sheet for each student or group

For Teachers: Teacher answer sheet

Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

Student Introduction

Background Essay

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the United States was a nation rapidly growing in all aspects. Not only was the population in cities increasing, but the U.S. acquired new island territories in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The job of maintaining open sea lanes fell to the U.S. Navy. For example, since the United States stretched from the Atlantic and Pacific, the U.S. wanted a passageway between North and South America to cut the travel time between the east and west coast. The Navy helped secure the land where the Panama Canal would be built and finally opened in 1914.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt sent 16 battleships and other vessels on a 14-month, 42,227 mile cruise around the globe. "The Great White Fleet," nicknamed because each ship was painted white, had a mission to advance American diplomacy and exhibit the strength of the United States as a new world power. At this point in time, the U.S. Navy was also growing with an underwater submarine added in 1900 and air power first used on ships in 1910.

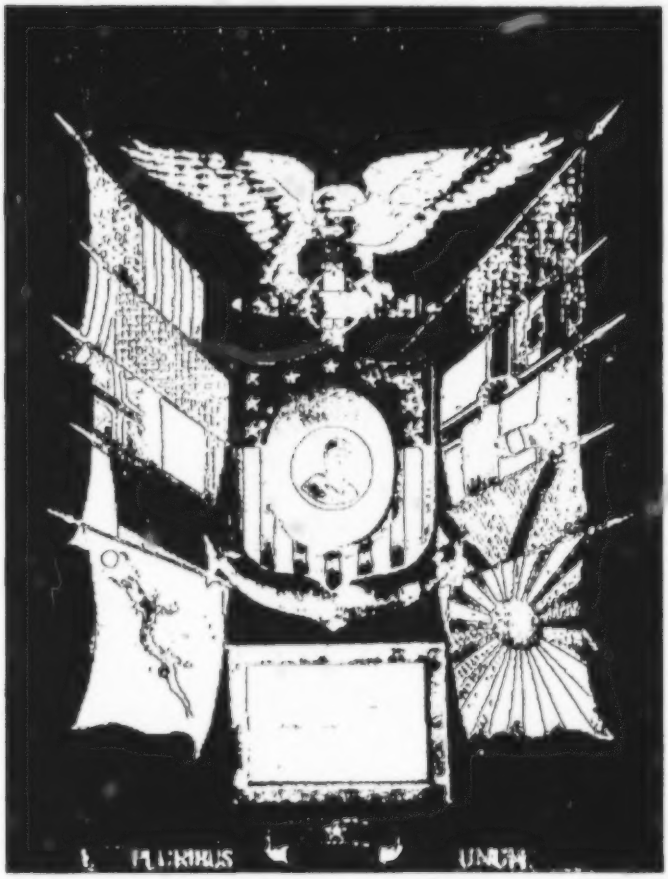
In order to maintain such a strong and well-trained force, the Navy needed to attract and train a lot of men to work on board their ships. The poster on the right is an example of the Navy's attempt to recruit more sailors.

Poster art was a major means of advertising in the early twentieth century. It was an easy way to reach a large number of people, since there was neither commercial radio nor television, and not everyone purchased newspapers and magazines. Posters were placed on walls along busy streets in small towns and large cities and reached millions of people. Posters were mass produced, inexpensive, and easily distributed nationwide. Posters provided the easiest way for branches of the military, including the Navy, to advertise to a national audience.

Life wasn't always as good as the Navy recruiting posters advertised, as you will see by comparing the poster (circa 1910) with a poem (1910) written about the life of a naval recruit. (This poem was printed on a postcard that was sent by Henry Norman, a Navy band member to his mother, Mrs. R. Norman who lived in Connecticut.)

Think of how the poster and poem function as historical evidence for understanding American and naval history. But, be careful. Remember that recruiting posters are supposed to *attract* people, and that Sea Going Tony might have exaggerated his story.

The Great White Fleet



Related Resources:

- Ships of the Great White Fleet http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq42-2a.htm
- Itinerary of the Great White Fleet http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq42-3.htm

The "Great White Fleet" sent around the world by President Theodore Roosevelt from 16 December 1907 to 22 February 1909 consisted of sixteen new battleships of the Atlantic Fleet. The battleships were painted white except for gilded scrollwork on their bows. The Atlantic Fleet battleships only later came to be known as the "Great White Fleet."

The fourteen-month long voyage was a grand pageant of American sea power. The squadrons were manned by 14,000 sailors. They covered some 43,000 miles and made twenty port calls on six continents.

The battleships were accompanied during the first leg of their voyage by a "Torpedo Flotilla" of six early destroyers, as well as by several auxiliary ships. The destroyers and

their tender did not actually steam in company with the battleships, but followed their own itinerary from Hampton Roads to San Francisco. Two battleships were detached from the fleet at San Francisco, and two others substituted.

With the USS *Connecticut* as flagship under the command of Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans, the fleet sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 16 December 1907 for Trinidad, British West Indies, thence to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Sandy Point, Chile; Callao, Peru; Magdalena Bay, Mexico, and up the west coast, arriving at San Francisco, 6 May 1908.

After the arrival of the fleet off the west coast, the USS *Glacier* was detached and later became the supply ship of the Pacific Fleet. At this time also, the USS *Nebraska*, Captain Reginald F. Nicholson, and the USS *Wisconsin*, Captain Frank E. Beatty, were substituted for the USS *Maine* and USS *Alabama*.

At San Francisco, Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry assumed command of the Fleet, owing to the poor health of Admiral Evans. Leaving that port on 7 July, 1908, the U.S. Atlantic Fleet visited Honolulu, Hawaii; Auckland, New Zealand; Sydney and Melbourne, Australia; Manilia, Phillipine Islands; Yokohama, Japan; Colombo, Ceylon; arriving at Suez, Egypt, on 3 January 1909.

In Egypt, word was received of an earthquake in Sicily, thus affording an opportunity for the United States to show it's friendship to Italy by offering aid to the sufferers. The *Connecticut*, *Illinois*, *Culgoa* and *Yankton* were dispatched to Messina at once. The crew of the *Illinois* recovered the bodies of the American consul and his wife, entombed in the ruins.

The *Scorpion*, the Fleet's station ship at Constantinople, and the *Celtic*, a refrigerator ship fitted out in New York, were hurried to Messina, relieving the *Connecticut* and *Illinois*, so that they could continue on the cruise.

Leaving Messina on 9 January 1909, the Fleet stopped at Naples, Italy, thence to Gibraltar, arriving at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 22 February 1909. There President Roosevelt reviewed the Fleet as it passed into the roadstead.

Illustration: Souvenir of the cruise of the Great White Fleet. Photograph of Edward S. Oliver Sr., mounted on embroidery. Photograph given in remembrance of Edward S. Oliver Sr. by his family, Naval Historical Center Acc. 84-062-A.

For additional reading:

Hart, Robert A. *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World, 1907-1909.* New York: Little, Brown, 1965.

Jones, Robert D. *With the American Fleet from the Atlantic to the Pacific.* Seattle, WA:

Harrison Publishing Co., 1908. [Includes complete lists of officers and men for each vessel of the fleet.]

Matthews, Franklin. *With the Battle Fleet: Cruise of the Sixteen Battleships of the United States Atlantic Fleet from Hampton Roads to the Golden Gate, December 1907--May 1908.* New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1908.

Matthews, Franklin. *Back to Hampton Roads: Cruise of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet from San Francisco to Hampton Roads, July 7, 1908--February 22, 1909.* New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1909.

Reckner, James R. *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988.

U.S. Navy Department. *Information Relative to the Voyage of the United States Atlantic Fleet Around the World, December 16, 1907 to February 22, 1909.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910.]Includes detailed itinerary for each vessel.]

Wimmel, Kenneth. *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet: American Sea Power Comes of Age.* London; Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998.

Related Web Sites:

The Great White Fleet: Postcards from the Myers Collection
http://mars.ark.com/~camorris/gwfleet/gwfleet1.htm

Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

The Rookie's Prayer
One Month Service

Sea Going Tony, Newport, Rhode Island, 1910
[Some items are hyperlinked to definitions.]

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my gear to keep.
Grant no other sailor'll take socks or shoes
before I wake.

Lord please guard me in my slumber,
And keep this hammock on its number,
May no clews nor lashings break
And let me down before I wake.

Keep me safely in thy sight,
Grant no fire drills at night.
And in the morning let me wake
Breathing scents of sirloin steak.

God protect me in my dreams,
And make this better than it seems.
Grant the time may swiftly fly,
When myself shall rest on high.

In a snowy feather bed,
Where I long to lay my head,
Far away from all these scenes,
From the smell of half-baked beans.

Take me back unto the land,
Where they don't scrub down with sand
Where no demon typhoon blows;
Where women wash the clothes.

God thou knowest all my woes,
Feed me in my dying throes;
Take me back, I'll promise then,
Never to leave home again.

Vocabulary

rookie: used in this poem to mean a new recruit in the Navy.

on its number: upon boarding a new ship, each seaman was assigned a number for all of his belongings. Sailors then hung their hammocks on the appropriate numbered hook each day.

clews: lines by which a hammock is suspended.

lashings: something used for binding or fastening a hammock.

Photo # NH 65452-KN Navy Recruiting Poster, circa 1909

Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

Student Answer Sheet

The following questions ask you to use the poem and poster as historical evidence to discover the world of a rookie sailor's life.

1. **How does the recruiting poster portray the U.S. Navy?**

2. **According to the poem, what was life like in the U.S. Navy for a rookie?**

3. **Why is the poster's message different from the poem's description of life aboard a Navy ship?**

4. **Using both the poem and the poster, how is the sailor's life different at sea from a life on land?**

5. **What does this poem tell us about women's and men's roles around 1900?**

6. **How can a reader use this poem and poster as historical evidence when researching theAmerica of a century ago? Why does the reader need to use caution when interpreting a poem or a recruiting poster?**

7. **Write your own poem describing an adjustment you have made, such as to a new school, grade, or place. Or, design your own "recruiting" poster to join a club, sport, or activity. We would love to see what you've come up with, so e-mail your creations to us at: brennan.sheila@nhc.navy.mil**

Sailor's Life at Sea (And a Little Poetry)

Teacher Sample Answer Sheet

1. **How does the recruiting poster portray the U.S. Navy?**

The U.S. Navy is portrayed as a noble pursuit with the distinguished looking sailor in the foreground and one of the new battleships (USS *South Carolina*) in the background. The poster refers to the national memories of the Great White Fleet's cruise around the world. It is also promotes the Navy as an economically appealing career choice by emphasizing the pay and benefits specifically on the poster.

2.**According to the poem, what was life like in the U.S. Navy for a rookie?**

Life was filled with fire drills at night and sleeping on an unstable hammock. The ship experienced severe weather that might cause sea sickness for a new sailor who desperately longed to return to the life he knew on land. His day is filled with tasks, such as scrubbing the decks of the ship with sand and washing his own clothes.

3. **Why is the poster's message different from the poem's description of life aboard a Navy ship?**

The poster is used to convince people to join the U.S. Navy and so only the positive aspects of naval service are mentioned on the poster. The poem, writes of the realities facing a new recruit. The poster does not describe the intense work involved with keeping a ship clean and ready, nor the dangers of harsh weather or potential enemy fire.

4. **Using both the poster and the poem, how is the sailor's life different at sea from a life on land?**

For a rookie sailor, living in a self-contained ship presented the biggest change of lifestyle. These men no longer returned to their homes after a day's work, they merely moved from one part of the ship to another for work, rest, and recreation. At sea, he slept in an hammock strung from beams subject to the swaying of the ship rather than on a grounded feather bed. He ate different foods than he was used to eating on land. By advertising the pay rates and medical benefits, you can speculate that in the Navy, a sailor might earn a steady wage and potentially more money than if he remained a civilian.

Probably the most difficult change for new sailors was the daily absence of women. Unlike on land where women performed most domestic tasks inside homes, men cooked, cleaned, sewed, and scrubbed at sea.

5. **What does this poem tell us about women's and men's roles around 1900?**

The poem tells us that women typically performed domestic duties on land, such as

washing clothes and cooking. It tells us that Navy men performed these tasks on board ship in the absence of women, and probably did not like that. Life at sea meant living contrary to contemporary gender roles in the United States that placed women in the home and men in a non-domestic working world. The fictitious rookie yearns for the gendered world of mainstream America where females washed his clothes and cooked his dinner.

While the rookie refers to the physical absence of women, men also missed the companionship and caring of their mothers, sisters, or wives.

6. **How can a reader use this poem and poster as historical evidence when researching the America of a century ago? Why does the reader need to use caution when interpreting a poem or a recruiting poster?**

Through the contrasts that are highlighted in both the poem and poster, the reader sees and hears about American everyday life. Gender roles and labor practices in the civilian world can be deduced by how life in the Navy differs, such as with male sailors washing their own clothes, but also getting medical benefits which a civilian worker would not have.

Any reader needs to exercise caution when interpreting poetry or recruiting posters as historical evidence, since both aim to produce an emotional reaction and their meaning may be interpreted in many ways. For instance, this poem's author may be an experienced sailor poking fun at rookies by exaggerating his descriptions of the transition period. The poster is a form of advertising for the U.S. Navy, so their purpose was to attract as many eligible men as possible to join the Navy. The poster's representations of naval life will not include the hardships or any negative details of living on board a ship. Despite the cautions, both documents are useful in interpreting the past.

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